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MUGABE COMES 'HOME'



"It is a momentous occasion when a man like you and an institution like Howard University are able to interact." — JAMES E. CHEEK

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARVIN JONES

Prime Minister Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe came "home" to Howard University in August to thank the "brothers and sisters" whose moral, material and political support helped enhance the long struggle for the liberation of Zimbabwe.

What was to have been a *by invitation only* reception was transformed at the last moment into a celebration of Mugabe's only public appearance before his American "constituents" during his short visit to Washington, August 27.

The Zimbabwean leader, inspired by the electrifying enthusiasm of his supporters and the traditional warm words of welcome by Howard University President James E. Cheek, put his oratorical skills to work. But had he elected not to say anything at all, the mere appearance on stage of this nationalist African hero would have sufficed.

True to his reputation, Mugabe gave those who came to greet him something much more constructive and thoroughly fulfilling—something more enlightening than waving arms: He shared his knowledge, his nationalistic ideals and his vision for the future of his country and Africa in general.

Mugabe spoke of unity, of the liberation of the African territories still under foreign-

imposed oppression, of liberation of the African mind, of solidarity, and of the need to continue the struggle toward the restoration of full "African dignity." For emphasis, he reached for the words of wisdom of fellow African nationalist, the late Kwame Nkrumah's "the African personality."

With his impassioned voice rising above chants of approval, Mugabe said it was "a very great honor to have been invited" to Howard . . . "because, this is the first time I'm visiting the United States and I'm visiting you after attaining our independence." He likened the occasion to "a reunion of forces that have been together fighting a common war for common objectives from different positions."

And, "having fought together a common enemy," he elaborated, "a common enemy who was a settler and used his own color as a criterion for privilege in society, and used our own color as a criterion for oppressing us, this is a moment for us to unite and demonstrate a oneness in victory."

More precisely, he delineated the philosophy and the ideals that sustain his people's struggle and victory over colonialism, oppression and racialism. "By fighting racialism, we did not transpose ourselves as racialists," he explained. "We

fought on the basis of principles and defended our dignity.

"As we fought to liberate ourselves," he emphasized, "we also fought to liberate the oppressor from the mentality of racialism."

Mugabe spoke of reconciliation with his former adversaries, on terms dictated by the new African leadership. He said "reconciliation meant the rejection of oppression, inequality, racialism, and the acceptance of a people-oriented government.

"Reconciliation meant for the former oppressor to accept the rule by the former Black oppressed. It is only on that basis that reconciliation can succeed."

Beyond the immediate concerns of reconciliation and nation-building, Mugabe—with the future on his mind—directed his attention at the more adventurous students among his audience and implored them to "come home" to Zimbabwe, to Africa.

"We hope that some of you, upon completion of your courses, would venture out and come and join hands with us," he told them. "We are glad you are in the United States," he noted, "we are also glad that you are in Africa. We need your participation in the transformation process. We also



need you as brothers and sisters. Come home, therefore."

The reaction was predictable. No standing ovation was necessary because the audience had been on its feet all along. He was given a sustained ovation full of emotion and renewed commitment to the struggle that forever will bind all peoples of African descent.

The African leader's visit to Howard University climaxed a day-long stay in Washington during which he captivated the imagination of the leadership at the U. S. Congress and of President Carter at the White House. His talks with official Washington involved economic development and reconstruction aid for Zimbabwe.

Washington was the second stop for Mugabe and his party. Two days before, it was New York and the United Nations—to witness formal ceremonies during which Zimbabwe became the newest and the 153rd member of the world body.

Zimbabwe has been free less than a year now. In this context, it would be appropriate to recall an item in the editor's note of last April's *New Directions*:

Ninety years of foreign rule of one type or another have come to an end in one of

Africa's most volatile regions.

The specter of a long and arduous armed conflict between the nationalists of Zimbabwe and the forces of an illegal regime has been averted as a result of the events that culminated in a general election last month.

Zimbabwe is now free, under the leadership of Robert Mugabe, who heads a coalition government of his Zimbabwe African National Union and the Patriotic Front.

For Mugabe, Joshua Nkomo, his co-revolutionary in the long struggle for independence, and for thousands of nationalists, the way to independence was a rough journey that took nearly 20 years—seven of which involved intense armed struggle. The sacrifices in human lives and property remain incalculable—all undertaken in the name of precious independence for Zimbabwe and freedom for the people.

At last, Zimbabwe has become an independent nation (April 18). The political domination by the minority white settlers, who constitute only 3 percent of the country's more than 7 million population, has come to an end.

In the sector of the national economy, the minority population and foreign corporations hold the purse strings. The hope is that they will now strive to work in the

best interest of Zimbabwe, for the benefit of all.

Mugabe, who at one time was incarcerated for 10 years due to his political activities in what was then Rhodesia, is now the prime minister of free Zimbabwe. Soon after his party won a majority of 57 seats in the 100-seat General Assembly, he was quick to assure his people and the international community that the advent of African rule will not lead to the displacement of the minority population in Zimbabwe. Once more, the skeptics have been proven wrong.

There is a lesson here from which the apartheid regime of South Africa can benefit.

Now that foreign rule is no longer the national burden, the people of Zimbabwe will have to start picking up the pieces and build the country under a system that will enhance all aspects of human and economic development.

The struggle continues.

THE EDITOR